DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 297 806 JC 880 351

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TITLE Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness: A Position Paper Prepared for the Committee on the Future of the Virginia Community College System.
INSTITUTION Virginia State Dept. of Community Colleges, Richmond.
PUB DATE 23 Jun 88
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Accountability; *Achievement Tests; *Community Colleges; Educational Assessment; Financial Support; Institutional Evaluation; *Outcomes of Education; Program Costs; Program Development; State Legislation; Statewide Planning; *Student Evaluation; *Student Placement; *Testing Programs; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Virginia

ABSTRACT

In response to a legislative imperative that all public higher education institutions in Virginia develop and implement a program to measure student learning and to use the results of evaluations for the improvement of instruction and the curriculum, the Virginia community colleges have either initiated or completed a number of student assessment activities. By October 1987, each community college had completed a student assessment plan designed to: (1) evaluate students' academic performance at entry, at mid-point in their studies, and upon exit or graduation; (2) assess the colleges' academic programs and placement services by measuring the achievement of developmental studies, general education, university parallel/transfer, occupational-technical, and unclassified students; and (3) involve faculty continuously in the entire student assessment process. In addition, the colleges participated in the development of guidelines and resource papers for student assessment, two informational workshops and an articulation conference, the development of a list of testing and guidance instruments used at the colleges, efforts to obtain supplemental state funding, the preparation of progress reports, and a pilot study of the efficacy of an instrument to measure students' comprehension of general education concepts. Planned activities include the development of a definition of general education, of assessment methods for students' general education knowledge, and of a Research and Assessment Data Support System. As even a minimal assessment program costs at least $12.00 per year for each full-time equivalent student, the Virginia community colleges are expected to expend a considerable amount of their budgets to assess student learning. A chronology of student assessment activities in Virginia, background on the accreditation and legislative context of the initiatives, and funding information are attached. (EJV)

ED297806

ASSESSMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

A Position Paper Prepared for the Committee on the Future of the Virginia Community College System

by

Elmo D. Roesler

VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

June 23, 1988

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OVERVIEW

Student assessment activities have always been a routine, yet important function of the Virginia community colleges. It is routine for students to be graded on their learning of academic subject matter; to be tested on their knowledge of basic reading, writing, and mathematics in regard to their placement in regular or developmental classes; to be licensed as qualified practitioners after passing qualifying exams related to certain AAS degrees; and to be admitted to advanced coursework only after course pre-requisites have been met or credit-by-examination has confirmed student knowledge of the subject matter. What is not routine is the colleges' response to the State and national call for even greater accountability concerning student assessment, particularly the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia *Guidelines for Student Assessment* (April 5, 1987) and *...The Measurement of Student Achievement and the Assurance of Quality in Virginia Higher Education...: Senate Document No. 14* (1986). The recommendations in this document call for nothing less than a comprehensive student assessment and reporting process to be planned for the colleges by June 30, 1987; developed during 1987-88; and implemented completely during the 1988-90 biennium. A more detailed presentation of Virginia's progress with designing and implementing student assessment programs appears in Attachment A. The contents of three documents are critical to the assessment of student outcomes and academic programs in the Virginia community colleges. These documents are reviewed in Attachment B.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In response to the Commonwealth's imperative that all public higher education institutions develop and implement a program to measure student learning and to use the results of evaluations for the improvement of instruction and the curriculum, the Virginia community colleges have either initiated or completed the following student assessment activities:

Student Assessment Plans

By no later than October 1, 1987, each college had completed a student assessment plan and submitted it to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). The plans are truly comprehensive because they have been designed to:

1. Evaluate students' academic performance at entry, at a mid-point in their studies, at graduation or exit, and subsequently as transfers in a four-year college or as employees in the workplace.

2. Assess the colleges' various academic programs and services by measuring the achievement of program placed students in developmental studies, general education, and university parallel/transfer and occupational-technical; and by evaluating the learning of students who are unclassified, taking credit courses or who are enrolled in continuing education, taking non-credit coursework; and

3. Have faculty continuously involved in the entire student assessment process -- from the design of testing and other evaluation procedures to the use of assessment results for the improvement of instruction and the various curricula.

To illustrate the comprehensive nature of the community colleges' student assessment programs, an exhibit of the Tidewater Community College Assessment Matrix (really a model for student assessment activities) appears on the accompanying page.

Assessment Activities, 1986-87 and 1987-88

In relation to the colleges' student assessment programs, the System and college staff have initiated several activities.

1986-87

1. A VCCS Student Assessment Task Force was convened to respond to the SCHEV Guidelines for Student Assessment. This task force also produced a VCCS statement on elements needed in the Community College Assessment Plans delivered to the State Council, June 30 through October 1, 1987.

2. The VCCS Student Assessment Task Force also prepared two resource items to assist the colleges in managing a host of assessment concepts held by the State Council (SCHEV), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and the Virginia Legislature through its Senate Document No. 14. In March, 1986, the colleges received "An Outline of College Self-Study and Assessment Elements" and a "College Assessment Planning Matrix."

3. Two regional workshops were held in the spring, 1987, to provide faculty and administrators (180 combined attendance for the two meetings) with an interpretation of SCHEV guidelines and Senate Document No. 14 recommendations. American College Testing (ACT) and Educational Testing Service (ETS) student measurement products were discussed.

4. Research and Planning (VCCS) collected testing and guidance instruments and then created a data retrievable file of the tests used at each of the twenty-three community colleges. These materials (a compendium list) were sent to each of the VCCS college campuses.

5. In the area of general education it was agreed that the Virginia community colleges would require the assistance of a professional testing organization to develop a test for student achievement of skills related to general education concepts. Nine of the twenty-three community colleges indicated their support for a VCCS pilot project on student achievement in the area of general education. The project was scheduled to take place during 1987-88.

1987-88

1. In August, 1987, the System developed a proposal "Budget Initiative: Student Assessment" requesting a special appropriation from the Commonwealth for assessment activities during the 1988-89 biennium. The System has already received 11.5 positions and $350,000 as appropriations for 1988-89, the first year of the biennium.

Exhibit

TIDEWATER COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ASSESSMENT MATRIX*

ASSESSMENT PROCESS	ACADEMIC PROGRAMS			
	DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES	GENERAL EDUCATION	UNIVERSITY PARALLEL	OCCUPATIONAL TECHNICAL
ENTRY EVALUATION	English Comparative Guidance and Placement, with Locally Developed Writing Samples Mathematics Local or Standardized Placement Exam	Open Admission Developmental Courses, If Needed Course Prerequisites	Open Admission Developmental Courses, If Needed Course Prerequisites	Open Admission Specific Admission Requirements - Selected Programs Developmental Courses, If Necessary Course Prerequisites
MONITORING PROCEDURES	Continuous Alert System Testing Based on Course Objectives	Continuous Alert System Testing Based on Course Objectives	Continuous Alert System Testing Based on Course Objectives	Continuous Alert System or Faculty Advising Testing Based on Course Objectives Testing of Skill Proficiency
EXIT EVALUATION	English - Writing Exit Exam Reading: Nelson Denny Reading Test Mathematics 80% Average in the Developmental Course	Summative Evaluation - Externally Validated Exam	Completion of AA or AS Degree Requirements Successful Completion Course with a "C" or Better Grade	Competency in Basic Technical Skills Completion of All General Education and Technical Courses
FOLLOW-UP	Tracking - English 101 English 111 Math 181 Math 161 Math 111	Graduate Survey Employer Survey	Tracking of Students at Four-year Institutions Graduate Survey	Credentialing or Licensing Exam, Where Applicable Employer Survey Graduate Survey
POPULATION	Placement Testing - All Students Who Wish To Enroll in English or Mathematics Tracking - Continuing Students	Exit Exam - 15% of Graduating Class: 5% AA, 30% AS, and 65% AAS Graduate Survey - All Graduates Employer Survey - All Graduates	Tracking AA and AS Graduates Graduate Survey - All AA and AS Graduates	Credentialing and Licensing Exams - Specific Program Graduates Graduate Survey - All Graduates Employer Survey - All Graduates
SCHEDULE	Placement Testing - Each Session Tracking - Each Session	Exit Exam - Spring Session Graduate Survey - Fall Session Employer Survey - Spring Session	Tracking: Annual Report from Four-year Institutions Graduate Survey - Fall Session	Credentialing and Licensing Exams within 3 Months of Graduation Exit Exam - Spring Graduate Survey - Fall Employer Survey: Spring

*Source: "Tidewater Community College Student Assessment Plan", October 1, 1987, page 36.

2. Several colleges wrote proposals for the Funds for Excellence monies reserved for exemplary student assessment projects. Blue Ridge, Danville, Southwest Virginia, and Thomas Nelson community colleges received awards totaling $308,979. These projects are scheduled to begin as of July 1, 1988. Attachment C lists by college the titles of the student assessment projects and the amount of funds awarded for each project. See Attachment C.

3. During 1987-88, the Virginia community colleges reviewed their priorities regarding the implementation of the assessment procedures described in their plans, initiated a considerable number of student assessment studies and projects, modified their student assessment plans and procedures and developed progress reports on the implementation of the plans. The progress reports were sent to the State Council by June 1, 1988.

4. While the scope and details related to the colleges' 1987-88 projects are of such magnitude that they cannot be reviewed in this paper, Research and Planning staff are compiling a *VCCS Student Assessment Resource Directory* to highlight exemplary projects that community colleges have initiated during 1987-88. The final product will be printed and serve as a resource on assessment initiatives for Virginia's two-year and four-year institutions and for interested parties in other states. The Directory will describe college assessment objectives, project methodologies, and outcomes. In addition, users of the Directory will find the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of contact persons and outside consultants associated with specific projects; and they will be able to identify sources of project funds, where applicable. The completed document will thus provide a System-wide overview of the varied methods used by Virginia's community colleges to assess student outcomes. Its contents will demonstrate the level of attainment colleges have achieved during the first year of the Student Assessment Plan implementation.

5. Nine Virginia community colleges participated in a pilot study to determine the efficacy of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) instrument to measure student learning of general education concepts. Several hundred students took the Academic Profile (ETS) test, and the results indicate that measuring students' comprehension of general education is a difficult task. The ETS test did not discriminate among the skills or subject areas. Confidence bands were so large that the test could not be used to evaluate and counsel individual students. Obviously, the whole matter of testing student knowledge of general education needs to be addressed by the System in 1988-89.

6. On May 2-4, the Virginia Community College System and George Mason University co-sponsored a conference on the topic:

DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT PARTNERSHIPS
BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND SENIOR COLLEGES:
THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

The conference featured presenters having the most current information on student assessment concepts and particularly on the

application of assessment methods. The audience, for whom the conference was designed, was the assessment team at all levels in the institutions. The general sessions in the conference had speakers and panelists from two and four-year institutions in fourteen different states. Other sessions included presentations by representatives from NCHEMS and from testing services, such as ETS and ACT. Some 155 persons attended the conference.

PLANNED ACTIVITIES

The System has identified two assessment related projects for 1988-89:

1. A VCCS task group will be convened to (a) define general education, including the concepts and/or skills to be acquired by community college students enrolled in associate degree, diploma, and certificate programs, and (b) develop assessment methods to measure student knowledge or outcomes pertaining to general education.

2. Another important project involves the development of a Research and Assessment Data Support System to provide for systematic, on-going analyses -- particularly longitudinal student assessment studies. This system will support research for the following: (a) data for marketing/retention research, (b) progress of first-time, full-time students who received high school diplomas during the prior year, (c) progress of graduates/former students as transfers to Virginia's public four-year institutions, and (d) developmental student academic progress, retention, and graduation data.

The twenty-three Virginia community colleges are continuing their work on assessment activities:

1. Implementation of projects cited in the colleges' Student Assessment Plans for 1987-88 will take place. The plans serve individual college goals for the evaluation, selectively, of various groups of students in accordance with a college's own schedule.

2. Cooperative projects are numerous, however, one area of cooperative endeavor has Systemwide interest, i.e., the establishing of competencies or outcomes for students in the various academic disciplines. The study of outcomes for the disciplines and/or programs in the Associate in Applied Science degree area is on the agenda of several VCCS faculty groups for 1988-89.

RESOURCES

The cost of evaluating student learning through the development and implementation of assessment programs which are expected to report "...concrete, non-anecdotal and quantifiable information on student achievement to the Council of Higher Education," is considerable. Even when large numbers of students undergo a minimal assessment program (one test at entry, at a mid-point, at exit or graduation, and at least one time as a transfer student or an employee on the job), the costs are estimated to be at least $12.00 per FTES, per year. See Attachment A, page 2.

The Commonwealth has already established several budgetary sources for channeling funds to the colleges and universities for student assessment programs.

1. Colleges may allocate some of their Education and General Programs funds, particularly Higher Education Instruction (100100000) monies for student assessment purposes.

2. Colleges may utilize their faculty and classified positions, as allocated through the biennium budget, to work on assessment projects. The community colleges, as noted at the beginning of this paper, have routinely carried out evaluations of students using only funds normally available from "positions" dollars or from Education and General.

3. The higher education institutions in Virginia now have access to two other sources of funds derived from the Commonwealth's biennium budget.

    a. A Student Assessment line item is now (1988-89 Budget) available, if colleges submit a "Budget Initiative: Student Assessment" proposal as part of their biennium budget process. For 1988-89, thirteen Virginia community colleges received Student Assessment funds in the amount of $350,000.

    b. On behalf of the Commonwealth, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia administers the Funds for Excellence project monies. In 1988-89, four community colleges will receive $308,979 to support the student assessment projects they had proposed.

During 1987-88 and beyond, the Virginia community colleges will expend a considerable amount of their budgets to assess student learning. If one were to assume that each year the colleges will spend $2.00 of normal appropriations monies (Education and General, and Positions) for every $1.00 garnered through state Budget Initiatives and Funds for Excellence sources, then the cost for one year (1988-89) is in excess of $1,975,000. As plans are made for future assessment programs, with ever greater numbers of students being evaluated, one has to expect student assessment program costs to increase.

Measurement of Student Achievement in Virginia: A Chronology, June 1988

The following chronology was reported in a recent publication of the Education Commission of the States.[1]

1985 -- Through Senate Joint Resolution 125, the General Assembly directed the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) to "investigate means by which student achievement may be measured to assure the citizens of Virginia the continuing high quality of higher education in the Commonwealth."

1986 -- The study, called for in the resolution just described and presented to the General Assembly as Senate Document No. 14, was accepted in Senate Joint Resolution 83. In that resolution, the General Assembly asked all public institutions in Virginia "to establish assessment programs to measure student achievement," with the proviso that "the Council, in cooperation with the state-supported colleges and universities, should establish guidelines for designing good assessment programs and report to the public results of institutional efforts to measure student achievement in its biennial revisions of The Virginia Plan for Higher Education."

January 1987 -- A task force of institutional representatives was formed to work with SCHEV staff to develop guidelines that reflected the recommendations in Senate Document No. 14 and that respected both the complexity of the Virginia system of higher education and the need to ensure consistency across plans.

April 1987 -- SCHEV approved the guidelines and passed them on to the 39 public colleges and universities to help them in formulating their assessment plans, which had to be submitted by June 30.

May 1987 -- The governor issued his "guidance memorandum" to the institutions for development of the 1988-90 budget request; in it, the governor stipulated that institutional eligibility for incentive funding would depend among other things on having submitted an "adequate student assessment plan" by the June 30 deadline.

July 1987 -- Institutional assessment plans were reviewed by SCHEV staff and three outside consultants. Some plans were judged to be adequate and some were accepted with stipulations.

A few plans were vague, underdeveloped, or demonstrated inadequate understanding of the nature of student assessment; they were rewritten.

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[1]Carol M. Boyer and Peter T. Ewell. "State-Based Studies of Assessment Initiatives in Undergraduate Education: Chronology of Critical Points," Education Commission of the States, Suite 300, Denver, Colorado, April 1988, pages 10-11.

October 1987 -- SCHEV received and considered proposals from institutions regarding base funding increases in the 1988-90 biennium required to implement assessment. Proposals were funded, involving direct budget allocations of approximately $12/FTE student.

December 1987 -- SCHEV sponsored a two-day statewide "conference on undergraduate student assessment" in Charlottesville, VA. SCHEV also released its draft "Report on Student Assessment," the final version of which will be included in its biennial revision of The Virginia Plan for Higher Education.[2]

[2]Since December, 1987, the Virginia higher education institutions have completed and sent to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia reports on the progress made in 1987-88 with implementing the student assessment plans prepared from June 30 through October, 1987.

The Context for the Assessment of Student Outcomes and Academic Programs in the Virginia Community Colleges

Three documents are viewed as the principle contributing sources for criteria and/or recommendations affecting Virginia higher education institutions' student assessment programs. These documents are described in the following paragraphs in this section.

SACS Criteria. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) has recently revised its guidelines for self-study of higher education institutions, and the revised guidelines for use in evaluating institutional effectiveness have been published in the *Criteria for Accreditation: Commission on Colleges*. The college self-study function, related to accreditation, is viewed as a systematic, cyclical process whereby SACS member institutions seek to improve the quality of educational offerings and support services by assessing the outcomes of student learning. Accordingly, college institutional self-appraisal statements must be supported by self-study findings obtained through a variety of research procedures. The planning of institutional self-study research activities is now viewed by SACS as a formal process. The college research and planning activities have to be organized to study and provide answers to those Criteria which are considered mandatory, i.e., those Criteria which are phrased as thou-must-do statements in the SACS document.

Senate Document No. 14. A 1986 Virginia Senate document contained the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia report on *The Measurement of Student Achievement and the Assurance of Quality in Virginia Higher Education*. The document recommended that —

1. Assessment techniques be utilized to improve the relationship between secondary and higher education institutions,

2. Higher education institutions establish procedures to measure student achievement,

3. Institutions establish thresholds for college degree credit courses and administer entry level skills tests to determine students who might have difficulty with college work.

4. Colleges provide remediation with no credit toward a degree being earned for remedial work,

5. The State Council form an advisory committee to develop guidelines for designing good assessment programs, and

6. Colleges and universities submit annual reports of student progress having "non-anecdotal and quantifiable information on student achievement to the Council of Higher Education."

Most importantly, the position taken by the State Council in this report was "against a system-wide minimum testing program for Virginia as the best means to measure student achievement" (15-17).

State Council Guidelines. In April, 1987, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia produced its *Guidelines for Student Assessment*. The guidelines were developed to carry out the recommendations of *Senate Document No. 14,* and to provide Virginia's colleges and universities with a checklist of items to be considered as the institutions designed and implemented their individual assessment programs.

Attachment C

Funds for Excellence Awards
for
Student Assessment 1988-90

Colleges	Projects	Awards
	SKILLS ACROSS THE CURRICULUM	
Blue Ridge	"Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum and Colleges"	$142,231
Southwest Virginia	"Promoting Student Excellence: Development of a Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Program"	$ 66,753
	COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULAR AND FACULTY DEVELOPMENT	
Thomas Nelson	"Creating a Framework for Faculty and Staff Development"	$ 22,930
	EDUCATING A DIVERSE STUDENT POPULATION	
Danville	"Educating Faculty About Teaching a More Diverse Student Population	$ 77,065
	System Total	$308,979

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